

Kyaka II refugees get new houses

PHOTOS BY HOPE MAFARANGA

KYELEGWA

By Hope Mafaranga

“Whenever it would rain, I would stand in the corner of my tarpaulin makeshift home with my two children, because it was leaking. Life was hard and it was always cold,” these are the words of Annette Kyomukama, 35, a refugee in Kyaka II Settlement in Kyegegwa district.

Kyomukama is one of the refugees who are categorised as people with special needs (PSNs), often unable to do casual jobs, such as making bricks or prepare mud to construct a house. They, therefore, are more dependent on external support or support from other refugees and the host communities.

Kyomukama was caught up in the conflicts of the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where she lost her husband and fled to Uganda in 2016.

She also suffers from lymphatic filariasis, also known as elephantiasis. Lymphatic filariasis is a health condition caused by parasitic worms that cause the swelling of the scrotum, legs and, sometimes, breasts.

Kyomukama was among the people selected to benefit from a housing project by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Uganda.

Charles Ed II Aguilar, the country director of ADRA Uganda, said the sh300m housing project in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement was a pilot project funded by private donors, through ADRA Denmark and ADRA Sweden.

He said they have so far constructed 50 houses, with latrines and bathrooms.

“PSNs are often unable to do casual jobs and are, therefore, more dependent on external support or support,” he said.

BEDDINGS NEEDED

The refugees said, despite having been given better houses, they still lack essential basic needs, such as beddings, firewood and food.

Kyomukama and her colleagues said the houses are cold and sleeping on the floor is a challenge.

However, Benon Babumba, the emergency programme director for ADRA Uganda, said the housing units have invited



Kyomukama with her children at their new home

PROMISE FOR MORE SHELTER

Aguilar said they are fundraising to build more houses to improve the living conditions of PSNs and enhance the resilience of vulnerable households in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement.

He noted that PSN had cross-cutting issues, adding that in the second phase, they will focus on water, sanitation and hygiene, livelihood, gender issues and protection of their privacy.

He added that for women and girls who are menstruating, hygiene was of serious concern.

“Men can go to the toilet in the open or bathe when opportunity avails itself, but women and girls cannot. They need privacy. Their hesitation stems from a founded fear of sexual assault, as well as gender-specific expectations of modesty,” he said.

demands from refugees, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and shelter and protection clusters, for increased support from the organisation.

“Due to limited funding from the United Nations (UN) and other partners, there is still a huge gap when it comes to the non-food items

Interlocking bricks that were used to construct the houses



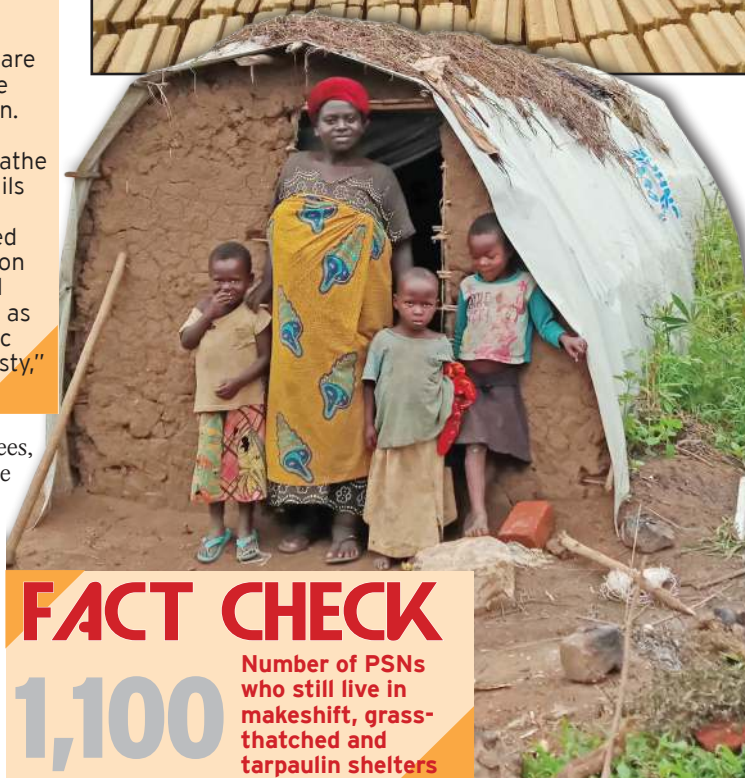
CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

Sam Businge, the project manager at ADRA Uganda, said the interlocking stabilised soil bricks used in the construction of the houses are made by the refugees and the host community, which has created job opportunities.

“The bricks are made from fine murrum soil, which is easily accessible. They are sun-dried, hence discouraging deforestation,” he said.

He said beneficiaries are also given assorted fruit tree seedlings, which are good for reforestation.

“Through working with both refugee and host communities, the project will empower and build resilient, peaceful and united communities. This will foster compassionate and social responsibility, which is required to ensure peaceful co-existence,” he explained.



FACT CHECK

1,100

Number of PSNs who still live in makeshift, grass-thatched and tarpaulin shelters

(NFI) for refugees, especially PSNs, mothers, pregnant women, the elderly, child-headed homes, the sickly and people living with disabilities,” Babumba said.

INFLUX OF REFUGEES

According to statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Kyaka II Refugee Settlement has more than 1,100 PSNs, who still live in makeshift, grass-thatched and tattered tarpaulin shelters. These shelters are not offering much protection or privacy for their inhabitants.

The current influx of refugees has overwhelmed and exhausted resources of the Government, UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In February last year, the population in Kyaka II had exceeded 110,000 and it is expected to continue growing, since the situation in DRC is not improving.

A more recent report – the UN Situational Report December 2019 – January 2020, noted that there is a lack of shelter and latrines, especially for PSNs, including disabled.

Mark Mutaawe, the commandant of Kyaka II Refugee Settlement under the Office of the Prime Minister, said the settlement has over 123,000 refugees, with a daily new arrival rate of over 120.

“The numbers keep increasing, which increases the demand of food, non-food items and shelter,” he said. He noted that OPM allocates a small piece of land to each refugee, where they construct their shelters, while partners take up other responsibilities.

Sam Businge, the project manager at ADRA Uganda, said the two-roomed houses with a latrine and bathing shelter will improve the livelihood of the people.

He added that refugees are also given agricultural seeds and tools to enhance access to nutritious food by establishing backyard gardens for vulnerable households.

“Shelter and livelihood interventions of the proposed project seek to improve protection, by providing access to decent accommodation for PSNs. The construction of the shelters and support to establish gardens will also improve livelihoods, not only for the beneficiaries but also host community,” Businge said.